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ABSTRACT

A tribute to Eskil Bjorklund is presented at his retirement as director of Sweden's Research on Higher Education Program at the National Board of Universities and Colleges. Bjorklund's work over the years is best seen in several accomplishments. He completely recast the program's mission and central contribution to public policy and higher education, defining the mission in these terms: "The program should be higher education's research into the foundations of its own activities." He was sensitive to the importance of creating an infrastructure for Sweden's newly expanded research agenda and to the internationalization of higher education. Bjorklund's program has contributed to the internationalization of Swedish higher education by promoting the movement of ideas about universities and higher education across national borders; stimulating the exchange and development of knowledge and theory in the social sciences; and creating opportunities for the movement of researchers and scholars across national boundaries. (SM)

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The Research on Higher Education Program: An Appreciation of Eskil Björklund

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I am delighted and honored to have been asked to join his friends and colleagues at this conference in recognizing the accomplishments of Eskil Björklund on the occasion of his retirement from directorship of the Research on Higher Education Program at the National Board of Universities and Colleges. What I say will very much reflect my own deep respect for the man and his accomplishment; but in speaking here in a language other than Swedish, I am also speaking for all the scholars in every field in many countries outside of Scandinavia who are in some way indebted to Eskil and to his Program, and who have been encouraged to contribute to it through their attendance at international conferences, through papers and publications and above all by being drawn into the intellectual community that he has created around his Center.

I have referred to Eskil Björklund's "retirement," but you cannot hear the quotation marks I put around that word retirement. That may be how the Swedish Civil Service sees this event, but you and I know better. I have reason to hope that Eskil will spend the next year or so writing a history of the Program that he has developed and led. When I first spoke to Eskil about this project last year he was initially somewhat hesitant, a diffidence which I interpret as arising from his well-known disinclination to place himself as a person too much forward in the work of the Program. I have suggested that he ought to

overcome this natural diffidence out of a sense of responsibility to the Program, to higher education more generally and to his country--that he was in a sense under a certain moral obligation to write a history of a Program that only he could write. I look forward very much to reading that history, which I suspect will not only illuminate an aspect of modern Swedish social policy but also contribute in various ways to our understanding of the interplay of knowledge and power, of the relations of the world of learning and the world of policy. It may also teach us something about creativity in public administration, and how public agencies can best support the life of the mind, a life which is ultimately beyond programming and shows its genius precisely in its spontaneity and unpredictability. These are all things that Eskil can tell us about--indeed he has been telling us about these things over the past two decades through his leadership of this unit. I hope, and indeed assume, that this project will be only the first that Eskil will be called upon to engage in on his "retirement." He and Elizabet cannot be allowed to retire to their rocking chairs in that charming cottage in the country and to the pleasures of their family and grandchildren in whom they take such evident delight. Of course a warm and compassionate society must allow some of that. But not too much. Eskil Bjorklund has still very much to contribute to the worlds of learning and public policy.

There are surely many people, indeed many in this audience, who know of Eskil's years at the Board much more intimately and in greater detail than I do. But as always there may be some value in a comparative perspective; indeed there must be some value since that is the only special quality I bring to this occasion. As an interested, and indeed admiring observer of Eskil and his work over some fifteen years, my sense is that his accomplishment can be seen as the sum of four or five distinct accomplishments, distinct at least to this remote

observer even if intertwined in the activities that his friends and colleagues have seen and admired close up. I would see those accomplishments in this way:

First Eskil completely recast the mission of the Program, and thus its central contribution to public policy and to the world of higher education. It seems to me that the Program's initial mission was to define and sponsor research, largely on a kind of contract basis, that would contribute to the definition and implementation of immediate or short-term policies affecting Swedish higher education. I think that Eskil's vision from the very beginning was that the Program must have a larger and different set of of missions. One part of his vision was to create a Program that did not just sponsor research on the basis of which good advice could be given to decision-makers in the Government. Rather, he envisioned a Program that would initiate and support a body of research that would more broadly illuminate the world of higher education in ways that would enable decision-makers in government and in higher education itself to understand more deeply the processes and the institutions of learning whose fates they were shaping through local and national policy. Eskil himself has charted some of these shifts in character and direction in his own periodic summary reports. As Eskil observed in 1982:

> At the beginning of the 1970s studies of the effects of higher education typically dealt with certain outer measures of efficiency and productivity, while a few years later the concept formation of the students is the focus of interest.... Questions of organization which were studied in the initial shape of the Program's existence were concerned with outer circumstances such as localization, organization of the studies, administrative process, etc., while the organizational research today instead is concentrated on the inner life of higher education as expressed for instance...through the knowledge traditions of various study programs, etc.

And he continued,

> This deeper penetration of higher education issues has gradually broadened the purpose and extended the interest groups of the Program. In the beginning, the Program was seen as a part of the central decision-making organization

> of higher education, its task being to increase the knowledge of the outer frames of the higher education activities, which should and could be planned and controlled from the political level. This was probably a reasonable ambition for that period, but it is no longer adequate in the decentralized system introduced in 1977, where decisions about direction, content and forms of activities are now taken in the various higher education institutions. It is, therefore, now necessary that the research Program serve all higher education interests more openly and independently, by contributing towards more coherent and, at the same time, deeper knowledge concerning the tasks of higher education, its internal life and its function in society.
>
> Given this more general purpose, it is also natural that the research Program should work in a multi-disciplinary way, The Program should give a multitude of perspectives. The types of study to be included, and the disciplines to take part, are just as important a consideration as the questions and fields to be studied. Research must illuminate higher education from all sides, so that it can be understood and treated not only as an educational or a research system, but also, for example, as a political system--and not least important--as a cultural phenomenon, and in a historical perspective. Such research on the realities of Swedish higher education should also increasingly rely on international comparisons.[1]

And just last year, Eskil defined the Program's mission in these terms:

> By undertaking studies of high quality according to the criteria of their different disciplines the research groups [of academics] should enhance self-understanding within the universities and colleges. The Program should be "higher education's own research into the foundations of its own activities."[2]

So part of Eskil's achievement was to redefine the concept of policy related research in the area of higher education to bring it over time closer to what we think of as basic studies of learning and of the institutions in which learning takes place.

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During the nearly two decades that Eskil directed this Program, higher education in the Western world underwent significant change, not so much of sheer expansion as of increasing diversity and complexity. And these changes in the character of higher education, arising out of its growing significance for economic and social development, inevitably have affected its relations to central government everywhere. The tendency, of course with national variations, has been toward the recognition by governments that universities must be able to recognize and respond to rapid changes in the map of learning, and to every society's needs for useful knowledge and competent people. And this means more autonomy in the institution, not the autonomy of the old elite universities, preparing a handful of people for the old professions and government service, but the autonomy of mass institutions, preparing a broad range of qualified people for a world changing so rapidly that it defeats all efforts at detailed forecasting and manpower planning. Governments everywhere reluctantly surrender the dream of manpower planning and the accompanying close management of universities as training facilities, and slowly come to see that diversity is higher education's central resource for responding to unforeseen change. And diversity and institutional autonomy go hand in hand.

In Sweden, U68 and its implementation in the early 1970s marked the furthest advance of central state planning and direction of higher education. The trajectory of higher education planning in Sweden has been charted and analyzed more carefully than that in any other country, and there is nothing for me to add on this subject. But the evolution of the Program for Higher Education Studies coincided, and surely contributed to, the slowly changing relationship between the state and higher education in Sweden. This change had two distinct components:

1. A revival of support for "basic" research and scholarship, based on a growing recognition of the intellectual autonomy of the academic

disciplines, and the legitimacy of problems defined by the inner logic and development of those disciplines; and

2. the parallel tendency to restore autonomy and initiative to the institutions of higher education which are the home of those disciplines, and of their research communities.

Along with these two broad trends in Swedish educational policy we have seen the tendency, documented by Eskil's annual summaries of the work of the Program, to shift some of its support from the disciplines that are most useful to central state planning--like economics and educational studies--toward subjects like philosophy, history and the soft social sciences which are the vehicles for illuminative rather than prescriptive research. This, I believe, was the Program's response to the two broad trends in higher education policy which were rooted in even broader political, economic and intellectual currents in the society at large, and indeed, in most Western societies, currents which are crudely captured in the concept of "liberalism." But the Program's response certainly reflected and encouraged those trends; its success, in conjunction with Eskil's own unique leadership qualities, undoubtedly was made possible by the fit, the congruence, between the work of the Program and these currents of thought in higher education, in Sweden, and in the Western world.

But over and above this redefinition of the Program's mission, Eskil was equally sensitive to the importance of creating an infrastructure for this newly expanded research agenda--an infrastructure that took the form of a broad and growing intellectual community, first among scholars and social scientists in Sweden itself, and then extending that community to connect with the invisible college of students of higher education all over the world. This it seems to me was a very important insight and a significant achievement--to recognize that good and illuminating research, whether applied or basic, must rest on a body of people who are equipped, trained, and motivated to work on those problems. But beyond that he recognized that this must be not just an

aggregate, but a community of people in touch with one another and with one another's work, and bound together by ties of professional association and friendship. The achievement here is an extraordinary one and I must repeat its key elements: first, a redefinition of the intellectual mission of the Program; second, the recognition that that intellectual program must rest on the work of a body of competent and motivated scholars, a body of scholars who must be found and then nurtured; and third the recognition that those scholars must be not just an aggregate of people situated here and there, but would have to be brought together as members of a community engaged in an ongoing and continuing discussion among themselves as well as with the Board.

It would have been a very considerable achievement to have seen the possibilities of moving in the direction I've just sketched. It was quite another achievement to have actually accomplished it. And here, at the risk of embarrassing Eskil, I must stress the importance of his own unique personal qualities. He was able to bring people together in ways that allowed their own talents and relationships to develop and flourish. Moreover, he understood the basic principle that activities generate interactions, that from those interactions arise new attitudes, norms and values, and that ultimately it is on these values and attitudes that a body of significant professional work rests.

In this effort Eskil's own personal support and guidance was always present if often concealed. How many of us have gotten letters from him, pecked out on his own typewriter--not filtered through a secretary--letters commenting, criticizing, exhorting, encouraging, always powerfully if implicitly conveying to the receiver that the work he/she was engaged in was important, significant, worth the time, energies and attention of Eskil Bjorklund? And if the typescript was often rather faint, indicating a somewhat worn ribbon, well, was that not eloquent testimony that the Program was in the

business of supporting scholarship and not administration? Those letters and notes and phone calls went all over the world, the radial lines in a spider's web that linked all of the members of this invisible college, this intellectual community, both to one another and to the Board here in Stockholm.

Every child knows that when you set a top spinning, if you want to keep it spinning you have to keep whipping it around. Eskil not only initiated new lines of work, new studies and projects, but he continually put much of himself and his time into the support of existing projects through the encouragement of the researchers, people on the whole (present company excepted, of course) of large if tender egos, needing criticism and resenting it, and yet taking it from Eskil! And that is perhaps because it was clear to everyone that he was totally impartial, without special loyalty to any discipline or university.

Finally among his several achievements is the one that I find most astonishing and, for a foreigner, least understandable--the considerable achievement of detaching a bit of the Swedish civil service from its ordinary functions and activities, and giving it a quite different character and mission. Perhaps the greatest of Eskil's achievements was this transformation of a unit within a part of the Swedish civil service into something else--an institution, at least semi-autonomous, which served a number of different constituencies in addition to the state through the enlightenment rising out of a body of scholarly work, rather than directly in the form of applied research underpinning specific policy recommendations. Let us think a bit of what this achievement consisted.

The Program under its original name of R & D for Higher Education had, like other parts of the Swedish civil service, a primary responsibility to central government--to advise the government, to help it shape plans and policies, and even to help implement them. But Eskil did something more

radical than anything I've said so far: under his direction the Program became increasingly the servant of the intellectual community that it was creating, rather than exclusively or even primarily the creature and agent of central government to which it nominally belonged. Looked at in another way, Eskil's Program accepted its responsibility to serve the State, but eventually did so by creating and then serving an intellectual community that stood outside the state, and did so on the grounds that ultimately that Program and the community it created would better serve national interests than would an R & D unit more directly harnassed to short-term government policy.

But to do this required that the Program gain a large measure of autonomy from the Board, and from its own administrative hierarchy, and thus from the boundaries and definitions of the unit seen as an ordinary part of the Board's regular structure and missions. Eskil fought for and won that autonomy, an achievement on which all his other substantive achievements rested. A knowledgeable Swedish observer said to me recently that, "At the Board nobody tells Eskil what to do." (That doesn't quite fit the model of the ideal--typical Weberian state bureaucracy.) How he did that some of you know much better than I, and I very much hope that Eskil will not permit his natural diffidence to obscure this crucial part of his story. Because that really is a crucial part of the story. The struggle for autonomy of the unit took many forms, but one or two elements were apparent even to an outsider like myself. For one thing, Eskil, for all his gentleness and modesty, was with respect to his beloved Program and its autonomy a tough and stubborn fighter. I would not like to have been a Chancellor trying to cut it back or trammel its freedom; indeed it is a testimony to the wisdom of the several Chancellors who have headed the National Board during Eskil's years as leader of this Program that on the whole, and with only one or two exceptional years, they did not trim its budget, but broadly supported the Program and its autonomy.

All of that testifies to Eskil's devotion to his Program, and to his bureaucratic skills and toughness. It testifies also to the wisdom of the Chancellors and of other administrative officers in the Board who accepted the Program's special status. But even that would not be enough to explain this aspect of the history of the Program: two other elements I believe were involved in the Program's autonomy and its freedom to change its character and mission in the way that it has over the past fifteen years.

One of these is the authority that gradually accrued to Eskil by virtue of his devotion to the Program rather than to his own bureaucratic career. Even a stranger from far away can see that the directorship of this small unit in the National Board is not one of the pinnacles of the Swedish civil service, but is in purely bureaucratic terms a kind of middle level position. And no one can tell me that someone of Eskil's experience, intelligence, energy and imagination would not have gone much higher in the Swedish civil service if that had been his normal and honorable ambition. But the fact is, as we all know, that he didn't do that, but refused to leave his beloved Program, and the modest administrative rank that its director could command on the organizational charts. I think we all recognize the phenomenon that people gain a considerable measure of personal authority when they visibly sacrifice careers and higher status to make a special commitment to an institution or a cause. When such a person becomes very closely identified with an organizational unit or Program, at some point he no longer merely occupies an administrative office, but in a sense becomes the Program, becomes himself the institution. There is in this transformation of person into institution a kind of organizational trade-off: a gain in that person's moral authority based on the recognition by others of his personal qualities and institutional dedication, which is paid for by the surrender of power and influence elsewhere

in the organization that would accompany higher administrative rank and position. The moral authority that Eskil gained over the years, which I may say this conference also acknowledges, was I believe a central element in the practical business of gaining the autonomy that he needed to reshape and redirect the Program.

But at the same time as Eskil was helping to create and sustain an intellectual community focused around the study of higher education, the community that he was creating was becoming a central supportive constituency for his Program, a constituency outside of government which nevertheless government and the civil service both had to take into account. For example, a few years ago, as we all know, the University of Stockholm honored Eskil Bjorklund (and itself) by awarding him an honorary doctoral degree. No doubt this was the academic world's acknowledgement of Eskil's significant achievement and service to scholarship. But at the same time, and perhaps not by chance, such an honor must also have strengthened Eskil's personal standing and authority in the Board, and thus the standing and autonomy of his Program.

So ultimately the autonomy that Eskil needed to carry out his vision of what this Program should be like rested, I believe, on three elements: first, the personal moral authority that Eskil gained through a widespread recognition of his character and commitment to the Program, a commitment that led him to sacrifice an ordinary career in the Swedish civil service; second, the support of the academic community, which saw in him a civil servant after their own heart; and third and not least, wise politicians, senior civil servants, and Chancellors who came to recognize that his Program, even if somewhat out of the ordinary in its searching examination of the assumptions of Swedish policy and practice, might in fact provide what Eskil hoped it would provide, a deeper and fuller understanding of the nature of higher education, on the basis of which better policies might be made in response to long range developments in the

worlds of learning, research and scholarship. I think all three of these legs of the stool had to be present for Eskil's very substantial achievement to have been fulfilled.

I've been speaking of what in Eskil's accomplishments is special and unique. But there are characteristics of his work and vision which he shares with other thoughtful academics, administrators and politicians in this country and abroad. Indeed it may be that one secret of his success was to create a unique instrument in the service of consensual values. However bold and original the Program was in linking Government and learning, policy and scholarship, the ultimate values served by the Program are really consensual values in a society, this society, that to a high degree rests on consensual values, and on the search for their expression and implementation. One of these root values in the area of higher education is a concern for the "internationalization of higher education," to which I want to turn briefly.

The concept "international education" is becoming fashionable and trendy, and for this reason if no other it may useful to unpack the idea and to see what substance it may have. Of course at the core of the term there is an implicit educational policy--the policy of linking one's national system of education to worldwide currents of thought, scholarship and research. And Sweden, for reasons you know better than I, is firmly committed to remaining part of the international community of discourse in science and scholarship. And it does this in a variety of ways, indeed, through the six meanings of the term "internationalization of higher education."

First, of course, is the movement of students across national boundaries, and from university to university. Students have been doing this since the founding of universities in the Western world in the twelfth century. The idea and indeed the practice of student migrations has never died, but was

constrained in modern times by the rise of the nation-state, its concern for national power and prestige and a distinctive national culture rooted in language, art, literature and scholarship. But one aspect of the current internationalization of learning is the effort to transcend the more parochial aspects of nationalism in scholarship and emphasize once again the relevance of learning across national boundaries. The movement of students between countries increases every year, partly in response to the emergence of a global economy, but partly also to the weakening of the tribal aspects of national identity.

Second, with the emergence of European institutions and the strengthening of the EEC, the internationalization of higher education takes legal and organizational form through the creation of internationally accepted academic standards, qualifications and degrees; ERASMUS is a case in point. The effect of this on Sweden, I suspect, is part of the broader issue of Sweden's relation to the Europe of 1992 and thereafter, a large and important question which I suspect will become a more salient issue in Swedish politics as 1992 approaches.

A third dimension of internationalization is the movement of ideas about higher education--for example, about its organizational arrangements, about the right balance of institutional autonomy and accountability, about regionalism and non-traditional forms of higher education--ideas, models, and the lessons of experience which cross national boundaries and influence national systems.

Fourth, there is the movement more generally of science and scholarship across national boundaries. All modern scientific and scholarly disciplines have this international character but in varying degrees. I have suggested elsewhere that there are national characteristics that mark the work of any national scholarly community, but these bear much the same relation to a discipline as it exists internationally as a regional dialect bears to the

common language of a nation. But these regional or national dialects are stronger in some fields than in others--for example, stronger in studies of law, or business administration, or social welfare, or education than in physics or chemistry or mathematics.

Fifth, there is the direct introduction of study material into the curriculum specifically aiming at the broadening of our understanding, and our students' understanding, of foreign cultures, and the parallel support of scholarship and research centers devoted to the study of foreign cultures, social, economic and political systems. These centers of research and study are sometimes related to national interests in foreign policy and foreign trade. But the study of other cultures and societies is also a part of the internationalization of higher education in that it enables us to appreciate more fully and more sympathetically the contributions to civilization of other nations, and of their artists and scholars and scientists and even their occasional statesman.

Sixth, the internationalization of higher education takes the form of the physical movement of scientists and scholars across national boundaries for longer or shorter periods--anywhere from the flying visit to read a paper, to the permanent settlement of expatriates and refugees. On the latter score we in America know well how immeasurably enriched our society and its universities were by the refugees from Nazi persecution who came to us in the 1930s. Their impact on mathematics and the sciences in the United States is well known, but they also transformed our ways of thinking about man and society as well. And Sweden, with its similarly generous laws of political sanctuary has also benefited from accepting into its universities scholars fleeing from political oppression. But shorter term visitors from abroad also have a large influence on national and domestic intellectual life of a somewhat different kind.

The Program on Research and Higher Education that Eskil developed and led was devoted, and properly so, to strengthening Swedish higher education and, through it, Swedish society. He has done this in part by encouraging the comparative study of higher education, and by involving foreign scholars in his Program. To point to only the most obvious of these connections, of the 232 written contributions to the Program's conferences held between 1971 and 1987 (itself an impressive figure), fully 67 or 29 percent, were contributed by non-Swedish scholars; indeed, for the most recent period 1980-87, the figure is 54 out of 142 papers, or 38 percent. What those figures do not show are the connections made or strengthened by the Program between the communities of higher educational studies in Sweden and its counterparts overseas in Germany, in Britain, in the United States and elsewhere, not to speak of other Scandinavian nations.

Eskil's Program has contributed to at least three of these dimensions of the internationalization of Swedish higher education:

1. It promoted the movement between nations of information and ideas about universities and higher education systems;

2. it stimulated the exchange and development of knowledge and theory in the social sciences generally; and

3. it created opportunities for the movement of researchers and scholars of higher education across national boundaries, and especially across Sweden's boundaries.

This third dimension has had unplanned dividends that take the form of professional and personal relationships that also developed between Germans and Brazilians, Dutchmen and Englishmen, Americans and everybody else, relationships that began at one of Eskil's conferences. And I speak here very much as one who has profitted from the Program's outreach to foreign scholars. Over the years I, along with many foreign colleagues, have had a number of opportunities to attend the Program's conferences, and to learn at first hand how this society sees its educational problems and opportunities and how it has

gone about addressing them. In the course of these visits I have made many friends and learned much from the impressive contributions to the international conversations on these matters made by Swedish scholars. And we in Berkeley at the Center for Studies in Higher Education, at the far end of one strand of Eskil's web, have been able to take advantage of these connections to invite members of the Swedish community (including Eskil himself) to the Center at Berkeley. Berkeley has profitted immeasurably from the contributions of Swedish scholars to the intellectual life of the University of California; that is not only my own judgment but that of everyone at Berkeley who is in any way knowledgeable about these matters. I am especially gratified that that fruitful connection between Sweden and California will be maintained in the future under Eskil's successor at the Program, Torsten Nybom, and my successor at the Center in Berkeley, Sheldon Rothblatt.

One last thought: There is I believe rooted in Swedish culture and national character a peculiar pair of attitudes towards individual distinction existing side by side. On the one hand there is the attitude that Australians speak of in their own culture as an inclination to cut off the heads of the tall poppies. Alongside that attitude, happily, Swedes show a quite contradictory readiness to acknowledge, to celebrate, to honor genuine distinction, a distinction based on accomplishment and not merely a distinction of status or reputation. It is that readiness to honor extraordinary achievement which we are seeing here at this conference. And I am very happy to be part of it.

NOTES

*Paper read at the seminar "University and Society" to mark the retirement of Eskil Bjorklund as Director of the Research on Higher Education Program, sponsored by the National Board of Universities and Colleges, Stockholm, Sweden, May 30-31, 1989.

[1]Eskil Björklund. "Research on Higher Education, Long Term Development of Knowledge." R & D for Higher Education. Stockholm, Sweden: The National Board of Universities nand Colleges, 1983:2, pp. 4-5

[2]Eskil Björklund. "A program Overwiew Comparing the 1970s with the 1980s." Studies of Higher Education and Research. Stockholm, Sweden: Research in Higher Education Program, 1988:1, p. 1.

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